(C) U. S. Forest Service

(C) McKissick

BEFORE AND AFTER THE GREAT STORM

Government experts estimate that eight billion feet of timber will rot to waste or, perhaps through carelessness, be the means of causing a terrible forest conflagration in the virgin forest of the Pacific Slope. The scene is pictured in these "before" and "after" photographs. This timber was leveled by a wind that broke the government instruments at 140 miles an hour.

Who Can Solve This Problem?

Government seeks to salvage eight billion feet of timber blown down by record windstorm in Washington.

THE Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of War, government forest experts, state officials and lumber dealers are looking for a man who can solve a problem that never before has been brought up.

A short time ago a windstorm came in from the Pacific Ocean and raced across the Olympic Peninsula in the northwest section of Washington. It blew down virgin forests 30 miles in width and 75 miles in length; an area almost as large as Connecticut. It was, by all odds, the worst timber storm ever known. It is estimated that many trees were more than 600 years of age. Experts connected with the United States Forest Service at Washington say that at least eight billion feet of lumber are contained in the trees sent crashing to earth or snarled together in a tangled mess in the great waste left by the storm.

Government officials are perplexed and worried. The swath of dead and dying giants of the forest will soon become so dry that it will constitute the greatest fire trap in the United States. A lighted match or an earthward flash of lightning is likely to cause a conflagration that will make the spurting of an average volcano or the burning of Rome seem like a breakfast fire in comparison. Such a fire not only would destroy this tremendous quantity of timber, but would likewise burn fifteen billion feet of beautiful standing forests to the north and south.

Secretary of War Weeks has sent three airplanes to the scene to take photographs and sketch maps to aid in attempting to solve the situation.

It is impossible for many of us readily to grasp such immense quantities as eight billion feet of lumber. Here are a few figures that will help in grasping the facts:

If these eight billion feet of lumber were sawed to boards an inch in thickness there would be enough to lay a board walk 60 feet wide around the earth at the equator. There would be enough planking to build a tight fence 97 feet high around the United States—across the Canadian border, down the Pacific Coast, across the Mexican border, thence along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts to the far corner of Maine. If some young swain with the restlessness of springtime in his blood had a desire to visit the fair and beautiful maid in the moon the lumber would be sufficient for him to build a walk thence six feet wide.

An Indian, who has been living in the far Northwest for more than 80 years, said the wind against the trees reminded him of a scythe cutting grass in a hayfield. He viewed the storm from a hilltop out of the path of the storm.

It never will be known just exactly how fast the wind blew. The government weather stations at several places were completely wrecked when the wind was registering 140 miles an hour. Shortly thereafter the velocity was greater. Very little rain fell.

Not a single person was killed but many animals lost their lives. That region abounds with elk, deer, bear and smaller animals, and unknown thousands of them were crushed by the trees falling. It is feared that many animals, hemmed in by barricades of uprooted trees, will slowly starve.

The greater part of the timber is hemlock and spruce, both of which are subject to rapid decay. Salvage necessarily is a matter of promptness, if it can be effected at all. The nearest railroad is 35 miles distant.

Only three times before in the history of the United States have windstorms destroyed large quantities of timber. In 1875 a strip of pine timber, 20 by 100 miles, in Eastern Texas, was blown down. In 1900 another storm galloped across Texas blowing down timber over country 30 by 70 miles. This timber is not nearly so large as that in Washington and the footage therefore was small in comparison.

In 1883 a storm swept over several counties in Maine leaving hundreds of millions of feet of timber prostrate. Comparatively little was salvaged.

The man who has the gray matter to show Uncle Sam and other vitally interested parties how to get rid of the fire trap on the Olympic Peninsula, and salvage eight billion feet of lumber, never again will have to worry about the money for next winter's coal.